



BUILDING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

**LINKING
HOUSING,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
TRANSPORTATION,
AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

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Chapter C:
—
**CREATING A
COMMUNITY
VISION**





Citizen participation

Making the planning process community-based, with broad citizen input, is a way to make sure that many voices and views are heard. Encourage active involvement. Communities that use consensus to set goals and objectives for the future find that the plan is easier to implement when complete.

Sample efforts

- Visioning meetings
- Focus groups
- Neighborhood meetings
- Community surveys
- Citizen advisory committee meetings

Effective strategies

- Involve citizens early and consistently
- Be flexible, accommodating unique needs and situations in the community
- Be responsive to public input and communicate the final decision
- Involve business, environmental, civic and other interests

Understanding a community's past, analyzing its present, and articulating its residents' vision for the future: these three elements make up a process known as "Visioning." This process is a key step in creating a Community Development Plan.

The purpose of the Visioning phase is to identify the points on which residents agree and disagree, and to build a common framework through listening and dialogue. That framework will shape the subsequent stages of the community planning process.

PLANNING BASICS

In any community, change is inevitable. You can either seek to guide change, or you can just sit back and let it happen. Choices must be made, because "not to decide is to decide."

Goal-setting is an essential element of good planning. The more clearly you can define the needs of your community, the more effective the entire planning process will be.

During the "Visioning" phase of the Community Development Planning process, the community develops a set of goals and priorities. No matter what your specific needs are determined to be, awareness of the following basic planning themes will help to focus the Visioning process:

- Develop a community-based planning process with broad participation.
- Promote interlocal cooperation.
- Provide housing across a broad range of income levels.
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas, conserve open space, and preserve the historic built environment.
- Promote sustainable economic development.
- Provide for transportation that focuses on the movement of people and goods rather than automobiles; increase the use of alternatives to automobiles, including bikeways and pedestrian ways.
- Build on the character and individuality of Massachusetts communities.

Getting started

Here are some suggestions to help you get your community's planning process underway:

- Form a Planning Committee that is inclusive and representative of your community. If there is a Comprehensive (Master Plan) Committee in place and its members adequately represent the community's diversity, this committee could serve this function.
- Make GIS maps, buildout analysis and the community data profile (See Chapter A "Buildout Analysis, GIS Map and Community Data Profile for Your Community") available to committee members and residents.
- Decide if you want to hire a facilitator to help you in the Visioning process (See Section E "Choosing a Consultant").
- If you opt to self-facilitate, decide on the appropriate planning tool(s): brainstorming, charrette, etc., to develop your community's vision and goals and objectives (See Appendix AA "Facilitation Techniques for the Visioning Process").

Creating the Assets and Liabilities Inventory

An Assets and Liabilities Inventory is a way of depicting the current state of affairs in your community. It defines the current assets the community values and wants to preserve, and it can highlight weak or unfavorable aspects that the community wants to change.

An Assets and Liabilities Inventory should:

- Function as a "visual tour" of your community, to quickly communicate what citizens view as "assets" and "liabilities".
- Use maps, pictures, titles, graphs, and explanatory text to create a portrait of present conditions.
- Involve a broad group of citizens in gathering images and working together to develop the inventory.
- Serve as a tool to generate consensus support for planning goals.

The Assets and Liabilities Inventory is an excellent initial step in the community Visioning phase. The inventory will help you to focus on your community's current condition within the framework of the Community Development Plan's four core elements.



Sustainable development

Sustainable development considers the needs of future generations and recognizes the connectedness of social, economic and environmental goals. It encourages the location of development where services and infrastructure such as water, sewer, and transportation services are already available.

Each picture is worth a thousand words.

The community of Westwood recently completed a master planning process in which planning board members, equipped with disposable cameras, took pictures around town that captured the essence of the community. They presented the pictures at a public meeting and explained the reasons for selecting these pictures. The pictures were then displayed at the public library, and citizens were encouraged to comment and to suggest other assets/liabilities for depiction.



EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE ASSETS AND LIABILITIES, WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CORE ELEMENTS

CORE ELEMENT	POSSIBLE ASSETS	POSSIBLE LIABILITIES
<i>HOUSING</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing • Historic homes • Elderly housing • Accessible housing • Cluster Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New development that is not affordable across a broad income range • New homes built on large lots • Deteriorated/vacant housing
<i>OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE PROTECTION</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Space* • Water supply+ • Farmland • Parks • Rivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contaminated former industrial land ("Brownfields") • Threatened water supply • New construction on formerly protected open space
<i>TRANSPORTATION</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commuter rail stop • Bus and/or rapid transit • Access to highways • Employer shuttle buses • Park and Ride lots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown congestion • Bridges needing repair • Underutilized mass transit • Land use inconsistent with transportation objectives or existing infrastructure
<i>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown business areas • Major employers • Industry • Village Centers • Usable Industrial and Commercial space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacant storefronts • Vacant factories • Car dependent locations • Improperly sited growth • Growth incompatible with community's character • Long commute to available jobs

* Specify whether protected or unprotected
+ May be located in neighboring town

Funding for the Visioning phase

A community may select a consultant from the list of consultants (See Chapter E "Choosing a Consultant") provided by the RPA to act as a facilitator for this process, or it may designate a local individual to serve as a facilitator. If it selects a consultant from the list, up to \$5000 of the community's designated funds may be used for Visioning and other preliminary planning activities.

Developing the community's Vision Statement

The Visioning process culminates in an overall community "Vision Statement." The Vision Statement should be a very brief document -- usually not more than one to two pages -- that expresses the community's priority goals and objectives for each of the four core elements of the Community Development Plan: housing, economic development, open space and resource protection, and transportation.

While the development of the Vision Statement may be guided by the community's Planning Committee, it will require participation from the full range of community stakeholders. If the community has not chosen a professional consultant to act as facilitator, refer to Appendix AA "Facilitation Techniques for the Visioning Process" for examples of facilitation techniques that should be helpful in developing the Vision Statement.

Checking the reality of the Vision Statement

Once a community has gathered all relevant information, examined and understood the buildout map and analysis, and drafted a Vision Statement, it is time to check reality.

- Does the buildout analysis information and other data collected support the Vision Statement?
- Can the community realistically afford to reach the desired future?
- Is it feasible to accomplish the goals over the projected timeframe?

The DHCD website includes a “Growth Impact Handbook” <http://www.state.ma.us/dhcd/publications/impac2.pdf> designed to allow your community to examine its future. Data from your town accountant, which is filed each year with the Department of Revenue, will allow you to tailor your reality check with the actual relevant cost data.

Communities are strongly encouraged to work with professionals and volunteers in the community as they conduct the reality check. The results of the reality check should lead to identification of the gaps between the current plan and the desired future.

Review other local and regional planning documents to see if any of them have addressed the gaps you have identified. If one of the plans or studies does address the gaps, and the plan meets the criteria specified in Chapter D “Creating a Scope of Services”, that plan can be submitted with the proposed Scope of Services for the Community Development Plan.

At the conclusion of the reality check process, the community should reexamine the Vision Statement, make any necessary changes, and include the statement in the CD Plan.



Participants in the Community Development Plan process

The list below identifies residents and organizations that can bring experience, perspective, and energy to the Community Development Plan process. In some communities, it may be useful to form subgroups working on specific issues relating to the four elements of the plan. In others, a “core” group might be formed, and this group could then host forums, hold “open mike” sessions, and/or meet with established community organizations to encourage a greater level of participation by more residents. The list is not all-inclusive, and is intended only as a starting point.

- Municipal officials
(e.g. Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen, Mayor)
- Housing advocates
(continued on next page)





Interlocal Cooperation

When neighboring towns work together during the planning process, everyone benefits. Funds can be pooled, interlocal needs can be addressed, and goals can be checked for compatibility. Cooperative planning is especially important with respect to several key areas: Many communities depend on water supplies beyond their own municipal boundaries. Water supply and protection concerns are major considerations in determining the immediate and long term impacts of development decisions.

For communities experiencing rapid growth, decisions regarding location of public facilities, infrastructure expansion, and transportation are likely to have direct or indirect impacts on neighboring cities and towns. For example, a group of communities may have a common need, such as public transportation for commuters.

Sample efforts

- Participating in a joint planning effort.
- Creating greenways and open space projects across boundaries.
- Extending sewer and water services across borders.
- Sharing services, equipment, and/or personnel.
- Participating in regional housing authority activities.
- Joint purchasing (i.e. fuel, school furniture, road salt, etc).

Strategies

- Involve neighboring communities early and consistently.
- Consider comments and plans of other jurisdictions.
Be responsive to feedback.
- Use regional venues (e.g., RPAs, Watershed Associations, CDCs) to identify shared priorities and explore options for working together.

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- Local/regional housing authority
- Elderly
- Young families
- Persons in poverty
- Middle-income families
- Civic organizations
- Religious community
- Local employers
- Builders
- Developers
- Community Development Corporations (CDCs)
- Realtors
- Human-service providers
- Municipal employees (public safety, teachers, highway department, etc.)
- High school and college students
- People from the workforce
- Seasonal residents
- Representatives from local and regional commercial and industrial interests
- Open space and resource protection advocates (Watershed Associations, Land Trusts, owners of significant tracts of land, and environmental groups)





Appendix AA:

**FACILITATION
TECHNIQUES FOR
THE COMMUNITY
VISIONING
PROCESS**





STAKEHOLDERS AND FACILITATORS

Community Visioning is a group decision-making process. In order to achieve popular support for the CD Plan, everyone who will be affected by it (the "stakeholders") should be invited to participate in the Visioning process. A hired or designated facilitator is essential to efficiently guide the process and keep it from bogging down.

Stakeholders can include:

- Municipal officials (e.g. Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen, Mayor).
- Residents across the full spectrum of age and income levels.
- Advocates in housing, the environment, economic development, and transportation.
- Members of civic organizations.
- Religious community.
- Local businesses.
- Developers and builders.
- Human and social service providers Community Development Corporations (CDCs), realtors, municipal employees (public safety, teachers, highway department, etc.).
- Seasonal residents.

The facilitator will:

- Remain neutral in the discussion.
- Elicit participation from all members of the group.
- Guide the group through a series of questions.
- Manage the way information is presented.
- Periodically summarize what has been said.
- Keep the discussion focused.
- Listen for and help resolve what is unclear.
- Help the group draw inferences and conclusions from the ideas generated by the group.

METHODS FOR SHARING INFORMATION AND IDEAS WITHIN THE GROUP

The first step in the Visioning process is developing a method for sharing information and ideas within the group. Such methods include brainstorming and charrettes.

Whatever process is selected, it should not be used as a forum for political debate, placing blame for past actions, individual posturing, or procrastinating. Rather it should be regarded as a first step toward collaboration, balance, progress and action for the coming years.

In Visioning, every idea offered by the stakeholders is worthy of consideration because all members are equally entitled to influence group outcomes. This process is most valuable when participants come with an open mind, a willingness to participate wholeheartedly, and a desire to contribute their time and energy to making this step in the planning process a success.



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an effective tool for expanding the thinking of a group and for identifying dimensions of an issue. It is used to create as many ideas as possible in a short period of time.

Brainstorming can be either structured or unstructured. In the structured method, a round robin process is used where each group member in turn is asked for an idea. The process continues until everyone has "passed" and no additional ideas are offered. In the unstructured method, group members voice ideas in a random pattern. It is a less formal and more relaxed process. The difficulty is that the most vocal group members may dominate the process.

Rules of brainstorming:

- Never criticize an idea - either in words or body language.
- Write down every idea on a flip chart or blackboard. This allows everyone to see the words and may generate other ideas. Put down the words as expressed by the speaker - don't interpret.
- There is no such thing as a foolish or stupid idea.
- It is okay to piggyback on other ideas or join ideas into a new statement.
- Do it quickly - 10 to 15 minutes works well although this time guideline is somewhat dependent upon the number of participants.

Charrette

A charrette is an intensely focused work session to generate input from concerned citizens and officials. What distinguishes a charrette from brainstorming is that in a charrette, ideas are expressed visually through sketches, diagrams, and maps as well as through words. This means that architects and planners (either citizen volunteers or professional consultants) participate in the charrette, so that they can help the participants express their ideas in visual form.

The charrette can help to identify critical issues needing further in-depth analysis and to develop recommended strategies of action.

Methods for determining priorities

The group participating in any one of these exercises can review a broad range of suggestions and identify priorities by using any of the following methods: nominal group technique, voting dots, and consensus. Such methods can be used individually, or (more often) in combination.

Nominal Group Technique

This technique is useful for eliciting and clarifying opinions, and developing group recommendations. The nominal group technique can be used for a small group or for a larger group that is broken out into small groups.



When using these techniques, provide 2-5 minutes of "I" time where participants can make notes to themselves on the topics before them. This will allow the process to move quickly and is designed to allow those who want brief time to collect their thoughts and articulate ideas to do so.





Each small group is given the same question to address, and each has a facilitator. Participants begin by individually writing down responses to the question. As in brainstorming, participants go around the group, each person stating one item from his or her list, and going around repeatedly until all items have been covered. The rules of brainstorming apply as well.

The facilitator writes each item verbatim on a flip chart; the group holds off on discussion. Items are then discussed, clarified, and numbered. The ideas may be combined if the people presenting the comments agree. Using index cards -- one card for each item -- each participant writes down his or her top ten items, ranking them from 10 (top priority) to 1. The facilitator collects the cards and records the number of "votes" each item received. The group discusses the results and then each participant ranks the 10 highest-scoring items, using the same procedure as before. If more than one group is involved, each facilitator gives his or her group's results to the meeting coordinator.

As an alternative to shorten the process, the group may be asked to consider fewer than ten items. Divide the total number of items on the flip chart by two and add one to determine the number of items to be prioritized. For very long lists or a short time frame divide by three.

To combine the priority lists created by smaller groups, reassemble the large group, present the different priority lists, and vote to adopt one.

Key issues:

- The nominal group technique elicits opinions that might otherwise go unvoiced, by giving participants equal time.
- This technique lets people with different backgrounds communicate their views and together clarify issues; however, this and other techniques that rely on writing and reading skills may marginalize people who lack these skills.
- Important issues may not make the final cut. (One possible solution might be to rank within but not across categories. Another solution might be for participants to rate all items as low, medium, or high priority using scores of 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The scores are then totaled for each item.)

Voting Dots

An alternative or supplement to the nominal group technique, the "voting dots" method uses small, colorful adhesive dots available at school and office supply stores.

Large wall charts are posted listing the different items under consideration. All participants are given the same number of dots and told to vote for the items they think are the most important. They may choose to "spend" all their dots on one response, or they may spread them around. The items are then ranked according to the number of dots received. Discussion of the results may follow.



FACILITATION TECHNIQUES
FOR THE VISIONING PROCESS

For very large groups, it may be necessary to break into smaller groups and run the process concurrently in several different rooms. The process occurs in the same manner, and the voting results are added together. Some validity is lost, however, because like items from the different groups are combined by the facilitators without the participants' input.

Key issues:

- Participants need reasonably good reading skills for the voting procedure.
- Because the voting procedure is not anonymous, participants may feel pressure to vote for some responses over others.
- With a limited number of dots, people must make forced choices and a few dominant issues may receive most of the dots. To lessen this problem, people may be given several dots in different colors to use within different thematic categories, such as environment, housing, economic development, and transportation.

Consensus

Consensus is an alternative to a voting process. With consensus there are no winners and no losers. Through discussion, the entire group reaches a point where participants are willing to allow something to go forward even if they do not enthusiastically support it.

The technique works best when a decision is under discussion. The group leader should ensure that every voice has been heard on the issue under consideration.

Each participant receives three file cards (red, green, and yellow). When ready to check consensus, the group leader asks each person to raise one of his/her cards to demonstrate where he/she is on the decision. Like a stoplight the colors indicate:

- Red: I do not agree and will block the decision.
- Yellow: I agree but I'm not really enthusiastic about the decision.
- Green: I can give an unqualified "yes" to the decision.

Participants are asked to keep their cards raised until everyone has viewed the display. If no red cards are displayed, then a general consensus has been achieved and no participants will block the decision. If a red card is shown, then more discussion is needed and other problem-solving activities such as listing pros and cons might help to move the decision forward.

Key Issues

- Some groups that value consensus spend large amounts of time talking about an issue with no way to move forward.
- Use of the cards demonstrates when the group can move forward.
- Using this model, one individual can block consensus.

COMMUNITY
PLANNING PROFILE**The Challenge:**

A large 1960s commercial shopping center losing businesses to more modern facilities in other towns.

The Solution:

Join with private developers to convert the shopping center into a thriving mixed-use village center.

Twenty years ago, the population of Mashpee on Cape Cod was growing -- but the biggest commercial property in town was shabby and economically struggling. Rather than simply giving it a face-lift, the developer and the town worked together to create a new village center on the site, featuring residential units, retail shops and restaurants, offices, a public library, and a post office. Today Mashpee Commons is economically thriving, and because residents can walk from one area to another, car traffic is reduced.